REFLECTION

MSc 3/4 Designing for care
Colophon
Delft University of Technology
The MSc Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences
MSc3 Dutch Housing Graduation Studio 2018-2019
AR3AD133 Designing for care

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REFLECTION

Reflection for the preliminary results of the research and design in the graduation phase
INTRODUCTION

In this reflection paper I will discuss the results of my graduation period, so from research to final design. This graduation project was not only good for my professional growth as a becoming architect, but also for my personal growth. I see this graduation period as a intense and meaningful moment of my studies. I will reflect on a couple of aspects in relation to my graduation project, such as:

- The relation between research and design
- The relationship between the graduation topic and the master program;
- The scientific relevance;
- The social relevance;
- The ethical issues I experienced;
- The potential applications of the results in practice.
“Can you help me with this slope? I find it hard to do that with my walker.”

She was really struggling with the interruptions in the sidewalk.

“Are you sure it’s not a problem to walk with me?!”

“Look at all those amazing flowers! I loved to work in my garden when I still lived at home. I miss it.”

“Look at those students enjoying their lunch break, so much liveliness.”

“Can you walk on the left side of me? I don’t see anything with my left eye, so I’m afraid I bump into something.”

Once in the supermarket she got completely over-stimulated due to all the students inside.

She asked me to get all the groceries while she was waiting outside.

Student hang-out.

There are 5 sidewalk interruptions along the route to the supermarket.

“Can you walk on the left side of me? I don’t see anything with my left eye, so I’m afraid I bump into something.”

“Look at all those students enjoying their lunch break, so much liveliness.”

“This path is horrible. Everybody park their bicycles everywhere, not taking in account the less mobile people.”

She was really struggling with the interruptions in the sidewalk.

“Can you help me with this slope? I find it hard to do that with my walker.”

“Are you sure it’s not a problem to walk with me?!”
The relation between research and design

My final design is influenced by the results of various studies:
1. The group analysis on case studies, which is about a selection of elderly homes throughout the years;
2. The anthological research during my stay in one of the transformed elderly homes of Habion, Huis Assendorp in Zwolle. This research contains various observations, talks and interviews with different people; the residents, family members of them and professional caregivers.
3. A theoretical framework which complements the anthropological research.

The approach of this graduation studio is what I found very fruitful. The humanistic approach is something which, in my opinion, should be done more at our faculty. In the end we design for the people, so why do we not observe/study and interact with them during the design process? A good cooperation between architect and user will bring the architecture to a higher level, because I strongly believe that you can not design for a specific target group if you do not know what their habits and wishes are. My week in Huis Assendorp influenced my final design in so many ways. This is something I recommend every architect to do; surround yourself with the target group you are designing for. Talk with them, observe them and join them during their daily activities. As architects it is our responsibility to meet the needs of the users as well as giving the users opportunities to discover their needs.

While we were visiting a couple of elderly homes I found out that these buildings were designed from the perspective of the architect and not from the perspective of the intended user. It seems like architecture in elderly housing, or healthcare in general, stays behind. There are still a lot of elderly homes with long linear hallways and a clinic white surface. The focus is too much on the care aspect instead of a nice living environment. This is something that would definitely change when we-as architects- start to observe and talk with the people who need to live there.

Besides the fieldwork trip I read a lot of books from different researchers and architects. Especially people with an urbanism approach got my interest. This is because of the fact that I found out during my week in Huis Assendorp that a lot of elderly have anxiety of the fast traffic flows in their environment. Cars who are passing by make them stay inside. So in order to make elderly part of society again we should start with the environment, just a new residential building won’t solve the problem. So I dove into the books from Jan Gehl and Kevin Lynch to analyze the environment and to come up with solutions for my specific site in Harderwijk. In the end I came up with a masterplan for a part of the city Harderwijk. A car-free zone where not only elderly can live their lives but a space for the city, so a space for everyone. A incentive-free zone to escape from your daily, busy, life. This is an approach which is not only adaptable for Harderwijk but for mid-sized cities in general. Creating a link between city and nature. This outcome is something I would never thought of when I did not stay in Huis.
Assendorp. Due to the fact that I went for a couple of walks with different residents made me realize that when you are sitting in a wheelchair or when you use a walker you become more vulnerable in the public space. I experienced with my own eyes that people were afraid to go outside, because the pace of daily life goes too fast for them (image 01).

My stay in Huis Assendorp also made me realize that I could divide my research in three different scales: the environment, the building (with a division in collective spaces and private spaces) and the residents. Each one of these scales had a couple of conclusions which were finally translated into design tools. These design tools functioned as a base for my final design. They functioned as a supporting structure to hold on to during my graduation project.

So, understanding the daily routine and social interaction of the intended target group of my building was the main focus of my research. An interesting development was the fact that how further I was in my design process, the more I sort of lost my view on my research outcomes. During the P3 I got some relevant feedback from Habion which made me realize that I lost my vision along the way. So I went back to my research outcomes to make the relation between research and design even stronger. In the end I managed to implement all my research outcomes into my final design. That is what made my design a substantiated final product.

To conclude, the way of doing research -the anthropological approach- in this studio made the relation between research and design very strong. The fieldwork trip brought my design to a level which I would otherwise never have achieved. The balance between theoretic research and practical research (the fieldwork trip) was perfect and worked out very well for me. My stay in Huis Assendorp for five days made it possible for me to emphasize with the elderly. I saw things which I would have never thought of when I did not stay there for a week. This made it clear for me that it is important to experience the building from a different point of view. I would highly recommend this way of doing research in the field of architecture.
RELATION GRADUATION STUDIO AND MASTER TRACK

The graduation topic Designing for care is highly relevant for the master of Architecture. We should face the fact that our aging population and the current developments in the elderly care is something which need attention. The transitions in elderly care policy ask to rethink the architecture of the home and living environment for elderly, because the current elderly homes do not respond to the desires of the elderly of today anymore.

This graduation studio is making the first step in the change of homes and living environments for elderly. It is a good thing that our faculty touches upon relevant topics, and the designing for care studio is a good example of it. This studio stimulates students to think outside the box and to come up with new concepts in order to make a change in elderly living.

Besides that, this studio also touches upon another relevant topic, the humanistic approach in architecture. In my opinion, this humanistic approach is something which should be stimulated more at our faculty. Most of the time we do research about relevant case studios, a highly analytical approach. From there one we dive into our design and loose sight of the research that was done. The approach at the Desiging for care studio was completely different. The focus was on the smooth transition from research to design. The whole process was user-centered. So use the observations and talks with the elderly as a starting point for design. Go from observations and talks towards an analytical translation, which will lead to design tools. These design tools will be implemented in the final design. This way of working is something they should do more often at our faculty and in the professional field as well.
Limited visual and physical access due to a mass in between. This mass ensures the indivuality of each space, and it accommodates its differences.

Adjacent spaces
Two spaces may abut each other or share a common border.

Limited visual and physical access due to a mass in between. This mass ensures the indivuality of each space, and it accommodates its differences.

Image 02: From observation to design tools.
SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The anthropological approach in the graduation studio is something which I found interesting. Seeing architecture from the social science point of view interested me the most. In the field of industrial design do designers, phycologist and anthropologist work closely together, something which still need some further development in the architectural field. In my opinion, the different angles of approach in the design process will strengthen your final design.

The MSc3 Designing for care studio is already trying to bridge the gap between architecture and social sciences by bringing anthropological research in the field of architecture. During our graduation project we worked together with two mentors with a different profession. Birgit Jurgenhake as an architect and Leeke Reinders as an anthropologist. This is something I found very fruitful. You will gain a lot of useful feedback due to the fact that they approach your work from a different perspective. These different perspectives brought my research and a design to a higher level which I would never have achieved without them. Their attitude of the mentors towards the humanistic approach was very appealing to me. Whereas mentors at other studios where mainly focused on a design which meet the requirements were Birgit Jurgenhake and Leeke focused on the relation between research and design.

The overall idea behind the studio was to move from anthropology to architecture. So, a translation of observations in an elderly home to first design principles (image 02). The research methodology goes from observation and conversation to architectural solutions.

The anthropological approach is a good way to reconnect architecture, environment and human life with each other. In the contemporary institutionalized society is the connection between those things missing. It is good to be aware of that fact as an architect, and look at a design process from the perspective of the people and their routines in daily life.

During the graduation project I spoke with a couple of architects who were specialized in healthcare architecture. They were intrigued by the fact that I got the opportunity to stay in an elderly home for one week. They were even a bit jealous when I mentioned it. I feel that this way of working can open the eyes of other architects. I hope it will create a movement in the field of healthcare architecture, because I strongly believe that there is a need for change- especially in that field of expertise. The focus should be on user-centered design, instead of looking at health care architecture from the perspective of the architect.
Taking care of your plants from the inside (through the window)

Movable panels to regulate your privacy

Storage space

A big window towards the corridor (social control) with a setback to provide in privacy.

Several spaces which are big enough for a bed; a journey through your home.

Image 03: Floor plan layout
GRADUATION PROJECT VS SOCIAL FRAMEWORK

This graduation studio has a strong relationship with the wider social framework, since the current developments in the Dutch elderly care were the starting point of this project. The aging population and the financial cuts in the elderly care lead to rethink elderly living, since the current elderly homes do not meet the requirements of today anymore. Nowadays you see a shift occurring from the old-fashioned, introverted elderly homes towards the contemporary, extroverted elderly homes. But is this the best answer on the current changes in elderly care?

I decided to search for an answer on this question and to come up with a new, improved solution regarding elderly living in the Netherlands. The whole idea behind this graduation studio is to think outside the box in order to come up with new design concepts. These new concepts will hopefully lead to a change in elderly living. So this graduation studio is definitely responding on contemporary social issues.

I absolutely see that my final design is not meeting all the requirements for the professional field. Due to the encouragement of going ‘crazy’ and think outside the box I came with a masterplan for Harderwijk which is possible, but will never be realized because it has a big impact on the city. At the same time I created a building which would probably be too expensive to build. There will come an austerity round before there is a possibility to build the project. At the same time that is what I liked the most about this project. I was completely free in my design decisions, because my tutors believed in the fact that complete freedom in design will lead to groundbreaking results.

Nevertheless, since we were collaborating with Habion, a housing corporation specialized in elderly housing, my project is still more realistic compared to my previous work. The collaboration with Habion gave me a lot of useful insight in the professional field. During the feedback moments a couple of people from Habion came by to give their opinion and feedback about my design process. This was highly relevant because their knowledge about elderly living goes much further than mine. It gave a new perspective on my work and it made me rethink a couple of design principles. Not only my mentors but also Habion was encouraging my to think outside the box. Since they are focussed on money and feasibility is it hard for them to come up with new ideas. So that is why they were interested to collaborate with the TU Delft Designing for care studio. Maybe, for future collaborations it is a idea to work more closely together with Habion. Now we met them just a couple of times during our graduation phase. I think we could gain so much more from the when we met them more often.

During the process Habion was interested in my solution for the open floor plan. With a bathroom in the middle and the movable walls around it (image 03). They found it very sufficient and it gave them new ideas for future projects. This is a big compliment, and it feels you are being rewarded for the effort you put in this project. Maybe I will find back some of my design solutions in future buildings of Habion, who knows.
"Hahah seriously, you're so childish!"

(leave the room)

"Maybe you should shut up, we were having a great time before you showed up!"

"You're back quickly from his room, hahah!"

(Sexist joke)

*Sigh*

This happens all the time Rosanne..

"Seriously?!"

"Just shut up and act as a grown up!"

"I just don't find it funny so just shut up or I'll give you a kick!"

"Actually nobody finds it funny over here (Not true, everybody was giggling but ok.)"
ETHICAL ISSUES

The ethical dilemmas I encountered during my research have to do with the fact that I did anthropological research, which was based on the residents of Huis Assendorp. It is important to handle them and the information they give with care. They need to stay anonymous but at the same time you want to use them in your research. I found it hard to find a balance between it.

For example, the conflict mapping (image 04). I want to give a good overview of what happened during those conflicts in Huis Assendorp, but at the same time I found it difficult to be completely honest since I knew that Habion would read it in the end. And I think that a housing cooperation should not know everything what happens in their houses. I was constantly searching for a good balance between openness and integrity while visualizing my observations.

So that is a remark I want to make regarding this way of doing research. Sometimes it is hard to find a way to be open and ‘protective’ at the same time. I wanted to be open and honest about the observations I did, but at the same time I should be protect the people I observed and spoke with and not expose them too much. Since this way of doing research was completely new for me, it would have helped me a lot when I received a bit more support during this research process. Maybe a moment with the tutors to reflect on the work I did in Huis Assendorp to make sure I visualized everything in a correct way.
CONCLUSION

What if there would be more time?

If there was more time, I would have liked to design the whole neighborhood instead of just one building. In that way my vision about elderly living would become more clear and the interaction between elderly and society would become more visible.

Another thing I would like to do when there was more time is to go back to Huis Assendorp with the results which came out of my research and ask for their opinion.

What have I learned?

By doing this graduation project I learned a lot about the healthcare system in the Netherlands, I gained a lot of inside in elderly people and their needs and wishes (something which I never thought about before) and it made me realize even more that in order to create a good design you should integrate and participate with the people you are designing for. But besides that, I also learned a lot about myself. I have learned that I should trust more on myself and the things I am capable of. My perfectionism is a big threshold sometimes and it results in the fact that I am never proud of the work I deliver. It can always be better and bigger, something which I struggled a lot with during this project. Along this project I found out that I am capable to work on different scales in one time, moving from an urban scale towards an interior scale is what made me enjoy this project. I hope to bring the things I learned the past couple of months with me in my professional career. The anthropological research approach is something what I found interesting and it would be great to use the methodology more often.

What is next?

In the weeks from now on to the P5 I will continue by finishing up all the drawings, finish the urban model, make a final model of the whole building and create a model of an apartment, scale 1:50. I also want to create a couple of renders to show the atmospheres I have in mind for the interior and exterior. At last I will finish my design booklet which will complement the first part (research part) of my graduation project.